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Viewing cable 06DAMASCUS149, CIVIL SOCIETY MULLS KHADDAM'S STATEMENTS, SARG'S

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06DAMASCUS149**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06DAMASCUS149	2006-01-09 15:18	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Damascus

Appears in these articles:

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6556
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0577

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000149

SIPDIS

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PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/09/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY MULLS KHADDAM'S STATEMENTS, SARG'S
REACTION

Classified By: CDA Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C): SUMMARY: Civil-society activists continue to discuss recent statements by former Vice-President Abdul Halim Khaddam, particularly those related to any aspirations for a leading role in the Syrian opposition. Most activists acknowledge Khaddam's real ties to the opposition, noting that some opposition figures are already making overtures to Khaddam. Meanwhile, activists noted new SARG measures designed to press opposition figures into the anti-Khaddam camp. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C): KHADDAM,S TIES TO OPPOSITION DO EXIST: A number of civil-society activists noted that Khaddam does indeed have the connection to the opposition which he has been touting publicly. Human rights activist XXXXXXXXXXXX noted that Khaddam had been floating his plans to go public over the last three months and had contacted opposition figures by letter, trying to gauge potential support. Sometimes critical XXXXXXXXXXXX cited his own ties to a Khaddam family member who had told XXXXXXXXXXXX that many Ba,thists open to reform had traveled to visit Khaddam in Paris throughout the fall, utilizing indirect travel routes to avoid Syrian intelligence scrutiny.

¶3. (C): According to XXXXXXXXXXXX, Khaddam's strongest opposition tie is to leading opposition figure XXXXXXXXXXXX. Khaddam and XXXXXXXXXXXX have a long history together, says XXXXXXXXXXXX, dating back to Khaddam's arrival in Damascus as a student in the 1950s. XXXXXXXXXXXX noted that Khaddam had encouraged XXXXXXXXXXXX to form his own party during the Damascus Spring of 2001 XXXXXXXXXXXX.

¶4. (C) CIVIL SOCIETY MULLS ITS POSITION TOWARDS KHADDAM PRIVATELY AND PUBLICLY: Civil-society figures are continuing to evaluate Khaddam's statements. XXXXXXXXXXXX told PolOff that discussion with Khaddam is in line with the Damascus Declaration, as the Declaration makes clear that engagement with the regime is desirable, even with former senior figures like Khaddam.

¶5. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX praised Khaddam's "change in opinion" and clear critique of the SARG, but at the same time said that XXXXXXXXXXXX does not believe that Khaddam should be granted "automatic forgiveness" for past sins. However, XXXXXXXXXXXX is convinced that politics will trump human rights concerns within the opposition, noting that with his recent statements, "Khaddam has done more for the opposition and has moved for change more than other opposition members."

¶6. (C) Not all civil-society activists are willing to believe Khaddam's new democratic, anti-corruption position. Human rights activist and Damascus Declaration signatory XXXXXXXXXXXX called Khaddam's reformist statements "lies" and considers Khaddam -- despite overwhelming evidence to the

contrary -- to still be part of the regime.

¶7. (C) Activists are also discussing public statements made by a number of Syrian opposition figures setting out conditions for dialogue with Khaddam. XXXXXXXXXXXX noted that senior opposition figure Riad al-Turk had made press statements in Germany that he would accept Khaddam in the opposition if he apologizes for his misdeeds. XXXXXXXXXXXX also alluded to Khaddam's appearance on al-Mustaqil TV with Muslim Brotherhood leader Ali Sadreddin Bayanouni on January 8 from two remote locations as a sign of dialogue between the two camps. (Note: XXXXXXXXXXXX hinted to Polchief January 9 that Khaddam met privately with Bayanouni prior to his December 30 Al-Arabiyya interview to coordinate their positions.)

¶8. (C) MEANWHILE, REGIME OFFERS CARROTS TO OPPOSITION FIGURES: Civil-society activists also noted that the regime is reaching out to some opposition members, cajoling and pressuring, to shore up support in the Khaddam crisis. According to XXXXXXXXXXXX, opposition figure and spokesman for the National Democratic Front umbrella organization, Hassan Abdul Azeem, has been approached by the regime (specifically Regional Command National Security Office head Hisham Ikhtiyar) to discuss the "opening of a dialogue." According to XXXXXXXXXXXX, the leaders of the five National Democratic Front member parties will convene in a number of days to take this suggestion under advisement, indicating a willingness to entertain the offer.

¶9. (C) The regime is also reaching out to political prisoners in order to shore up its anti-Khaddam platform. According to XXXXXXXXXXXX, XXXXXXXXXXXX has been approached twice by individuals with regime ties urging him to publicly come out against Khaddam in exchange for "help" in his case. XXXXXXXXXXXX indicated that XXXXXXXXXXXX is not willing to make such statements. (NOTE: XXXXXXXXXXXX also indicated that the SARG is utilizing sticks against possible Khaddam supporters, citing a report that 82 Khaddam associates whom XXXXXXXXXXXX described as 'old guard' were detained by security services in and around Damascus on January 7, including at least one former Syrian ambassador. Poloff has been unable to confirm this report with human rights organizations).

¶10. (C) Civil-society activists are also discussing the implications of President Bashar al-Asad's January 3 comments to al-Usbua newspaper regarding the potential for a human rights ministry. Activists were especially surprised at Asad's acknowledgment of the existence and unofficial tolerance of unlicensed civil-society organizations and his noting that the government is contemplating a "mechanism that is more legal" for such NGOs. While skeptical that Asad is seriously contemplating such a move, XXXXXXXXXXXX and XXXXXXXXXXXX both noted that the statement was significant and may be an attempt to signal a willingness for reform in the midst of renewed pressure.

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